

REBALANCING ACT

MCGUIRE AND DOVER GET
NEW CARGO HUB STATUS

BY STAFF SGT. MATTHEW BATES

Airmen from the 386th and 379th air expeditionary wings unload a mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle from a C-17 Globemaster III at a base in Southwest Asia. The plane is from the 437th Airlift Wing, Charleston Air Force Base, S.C., which flew the bulk of Southwest Asia cargo deliveries until McGuire AFB, N.J., and Dover AFB, Del., took over most of the duties.

In Tikrit, Iraq, Soldiers check their weapons, climb into their up-armored Humvees and roll out to provide security for a supply convoy.

At Balad Air Base, the hospital staff uses bandages, salves, needles and other medical supplies to provide initial care, save lives and help get the wounded back in the fight.

In Kabul, Afghanistan, large sacks of mail bring a touch of home and a lot of joy to Airmen deployed a world away from their “state-side lives.”

And at bases throughout the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors and Marines depend on military airlift to get the parts to fix broken aircraft, ammunition to put rounds on targets and food to stay in the war on terrorism.

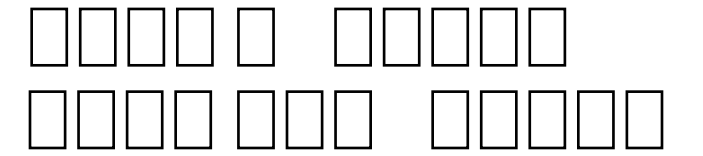
But none of these supplies would be available without the steady flow of Air Force transport aircraft that deliver needed cargo to this part of the world. Without the precious cargo, missions may fail, aircraft would stay broken and lives could be lost.

Because of this, the Department of Defense and the Air Force constantly seek ways to more quickly transport needed equipment and supplies from the United States to the warfighter. Rebalancing Air Mobility Command’s East Coast aerial port is one way they’re doing that.

For more than four years, Charleston Air Force Base, S.C., has been the airlift hub for cargo needed to support Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. But defense supply locations and shipping

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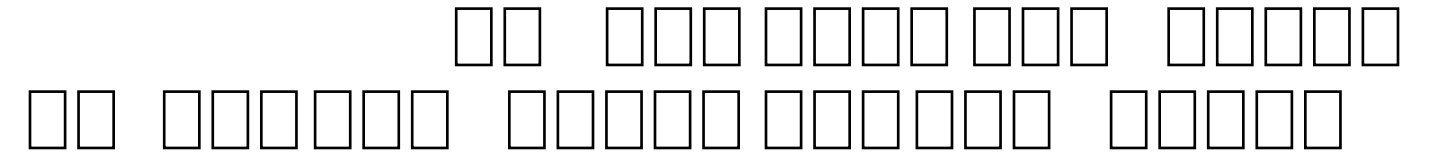
terminals are all located in the northeastern part of the country, with the largest of these being the depot at Susquehanna, Pa. This meant huge trucks laden with cargo had to go all the way from Pennsylvania to Charleston — bypassing several key airlift bases along the way.



Air Force and DOD officials looked at the process and saw a better alternative. Why not move cargo to bases closer to the suppliers?

“If most of the cargo is coming out of the northeast, then it would obviously be cheaper to truck that to New Jersey or Delaware,” said Maj. Gen. Ronald Ladnier, commander of AMC’s Tanker Airlift Control Center at Scott AFB, Ill.

That’s what the airlift command did. As part of the new aerial port rebalancing initiative, McGuire AFB, N.J., and Dover AFB, Del., are now the major hubs for cargo headed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Charleston, meanwhile, will remain an essential cargo hub, and the gateway for the shipment of hundreds of the new mine-resistant,



Air transportation Airman 1st Class Trevor Watson helps load duffle bags, bound for Southwest Asia, onto a contract aircraft at McGuire Air Force Base, N.J.

ambush-protected vehicles.

“From a logistical standpoint, it’s a move that really makes sense,” said Maj. Edward Peterson, commander of McGuire’s 305th Aerial Port Squadron.

Reasonableness aside, the move also saves time and money. “This rebalancing is a ‘win’ for the warfighters and the American taxpayer,” General Ladnier said. “This initiative will put needed equipment in the hands of warfighters more quickly, while saving taxpayer dollars each year.”

Flown from McGuire and Dover, cargo reaches the Middle East an average of 24 hours earlier than from Charleston. This will save about \$40.3 million in transportation costs annually.

But at the two bases, it’s not the savings that have Airmen excited. It’s the new mission.

“A lot more cargo will pass through our port, which means a lot more work,” McGuire air freight supervisor Staff Sgt. Nicholas Marsh said. “But we couldn’t be more thrilled. This cargo will help the war effort. With our new mission, we’re directly contributing to that war effort.”

Still, this new mission is not without its challenges, the sergeant said. And many of the challenges will affect units outside the aerial port squadron, like McGuire’s Checkpoint 9. The unit scans, searches and validates each and every cargo-laden vehicle that enters the base.

“Now we inspect 50 to 70 more trucks per day,” said Master Sgt. Joseph DiLorenzo, NCO in charge of Checkpoint 9. “That’s on top of the 7,500 we typically inspect each month.”

The fact each checkpoint Airman is a volunteer with no prior vehicle inspection experience makes the number of trucks the checkpoint handles even more impressive. These augmentees are from units throughout the base and perform checkpoint duties for 30 to 90 days at a time.

“This high turnover rate means there’s very little time for training,” Sergeant DiLorenzo said. The Airmen have to learn their duties quickly.

But with help from transportation Airmen, the sergeant is confident his volunteers will get the job done. And like the base’s aerial porters, he’s excited about the new mission.

“This is our chance to make a difference,” Sergeant DiLorenzo said.

Challenges like those at Checkpoint 9 will occur elsewhere at each of the two bases, said Col. Balan Ayyar, commander of McGuire’s 305th Air Mobility Wing.

“But are we ready for them? Definitely,” the colonel said. “We’ve been preparing for this mission all over the base.”

To handle the extra work, each base will need more refueling trucks and maintenance crews to service the surge of aircraft on the flightline. Each will need new facilities to house special types of cargo not normally handled, like ammunition and other hazardous items. And there will be a need for more Airmen in the aerial port to help handle the increase of cargo and people.

Preparations include using Air Force Smart Operations 21 tools and multi-functional teams to examine ways to improve and streamline aerial port processes. At McGuire, that means making more efficient use of an existing 55,000-square-foot facility. In addition, a \$2 million infrastructure upgrade created a new in-transit munitions facility and an expanded cargo marshalling area.

“We’re going to need every inch of it, too,” Major Peterson said.

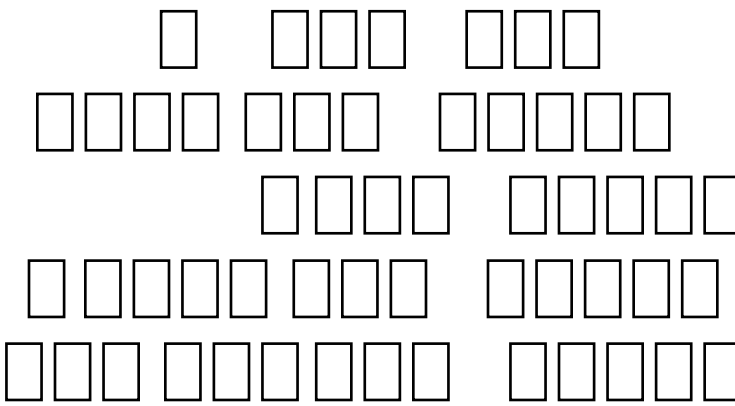
Colonel Ayyar expects McGuire’s cargo flow to grow exponentially. Before the rebalancing initiative, the base received about 150 tons of cargo each month. The new mission should increase that to nearly 5,000 tons a month.

Daunting as these numbers may seem, the wing is unimpressed. Its leaders simply point to the base’s legacy.

“Cargo hauling is in our blood,” Colonel Ayyar said. “This base was a major hub during World War II, so, in essence, it’s like we’re returning to our heritage.”

Plus, taking this new mission will enable cargo delivery to the Middle East to be simpler, shorter and less expensive. That makes sense, logistically and monetarily, General Ladnier said.

“How can you argue with faster and cheaper?” he said. 🙏



An air transportation Airman with McGuire’s 305th Aerial Port Squadron ensures cargo is properly loaded before the aircraft takes off for Southwest Asia.